

THE ENJOYMENT OF THE ARTS

Another Aspect of Rehabilitation

Mary E. Switzer

Commissioner

Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, H.E.W.
Washington, D. C.

Reprinted from

BLINDNESS 1967 ★ AAWB ANNUAL

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF WORKERS FOR THE BLIND, INC.

1511 K Street, N.W.

Washington, D. C. 20005

THE ENJOYMENT OF THE ARTS

Another Aspect of Rehabilitation

*By Mary E. Switzer**

*Commissioner of Vocational Rehabilitation
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare*

Art is the one form of human energy in the whole world which really works for union and destroys the barriers between man and man. It is the real cement of human life; the everlasting refreshment and renewal.

John Galsworthy

Although the "aesthetic experience is one of the most vivid and moving forms of human activity,"¹ it is all too seldom recognized as an experience necessary to the development of an individual's full potential for life. Almost never is this aspect of the human need given any consideration by workers in the various helping professions, whose primary duty is serving people in trouble, and helping them to achieve productive lives. Public programs, particularly, seem vulnerable in this regard.

Although hardly a day goes by that we do not see some story of children and young people actually engaged in the creative process of painting, the theater, music or sculpture, and although the development of schools of art in our colleges and universities is a growing trend, we have tended in public programs to consider any emphasis on, or involvement of our programs in an adventure with the arts as irrelevant, or at the very most of low priority. And yet, our Presidents have not hesitated to reflect on the essential place of the arts, and through them the importance of creative and aesthetic experience in the totality of American life.

President Kennedy had this to say when he established the Advisory Council on the Arts in June, 1963:

The Government has a responsibility to see that this important aspect of our lives is not neglected. The concept of the public welfare should reflect cultural as well as physical values, aesthetic as well as economic considerations. We have agencies of the Government which are concerned with the welfare and advancement of science and technology, of education, recreation and health. We should now begin to give similar attention to the arts.²

*Assisted by Nancy Bereano

And I would add another dimension—the integration of the creative and aesthetic experience into these "non-aesthetic" programs.

In another context, President Kennedy wrote:

Both Roosevelt and Lincoln understood that the life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose—and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization. That is why we should be glad today that the interest of the American people in the arts seems at a new high.³

George Biddle, the distinguished American artist said of President Franklin Roosevelt, "...he had a more clear understanding of what art could mean in the life of a community—for the soul of a nation—than any man I have known."⁴

President Lincoln could stop in the middle of the Civil War to dedicate the newly-completed Capitol Dome with the bronze goddess of Freedom on top—and in answer to those who found much to criticize in diverting labor and money from the prosecution of the war, say: "If people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign that we intend this Union shall go on."⁵

In the pursuit of excellence in whatever we do, those responsible for public programs of service search deeply for aspects of community life to quicken understanding and stimulate those we serve to develop every sense to the fullest. To quote President Kennedy again:

A need within contemporary civilization, a hunger for certain values and satisfactions, appears to be urging us all to explore and appreciate areas of life which, in the past, we have sometimes neglected in the United States.⁶

As the museums of the country in this affluent age have found millions of dollars to purchase a Rembrandt, a Goya, or a da Vinci, it has been next to impossible to convince their governing bodies, even the publicly supported ones, that all of the public has a right to enjoy their holdings. Notable exceptions to this generalization are described in this paper.

And so in this moving scene of today and tomorrow, we look to institutions and experiences out of the normal flow to stimulate and excite us as individuals and public servants to make the most of what lies all about us.

In the program of vocational rehabilitation, every possible encouragement is given to individuals who have talent in the arts, and the record of achievement in painting, commercial art, drafting, designing and similar pursuits is impressive. Exhibits of the work of such people are commonplace in many communities and in national meetings.

We are concerned, in addition to the actual participants—and they are not only in the graphic arts, but also in music and the theater—with seeing that the great audience eagerly sharing a delight in the arts includes our handicapped citizens. It may be observed that the enjoyment of our artistic accomplishments knows no barriers—that individuals of all trades and professions,

of all ages and in all parts of the nation are part of the great and growing audience. But, are they all?

If you have to climb a high flight of stairs to a concert hall and are in a wheel chair, hearing the symphony "in situ" is denied you. If you are deaf, a talking picture—a movie—is only barely understandable. If you are blind and a museum has only pictures, the aesthetic experience through the eyes is denied you. If a museum has a fine collection of sculpture and it can only be enjoyed by looking, everyone loses, for some art objects are truly what Paul Barron calls "tactiles" and can only be fully enjoyed by the sense of touch.

President Johnson stressed this aspect a number of times when he was transmitting the proposal for the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, and later when he signed the bill establishing the Foundation:

Pursuit of artistic achievement, and making the fruits of that achievement available to all its people, is among the hallmarks of a Great Society. . . .government can seek to create conditions under which the arts can flourish through recognition of achievements, through helping those who seek to enlarge creative understanding, through increasing the access of our people to the works of our artists, and through recognizing the arts as part of the pursuit of American greatness.⁷

The National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities has, during its brief existence, demonstrated its interest in many forms of creative expression: the theatre, music, dance, poetry, literature, painting and sculpture have all benefitted. But the entire field of government support and encouragement of the arts is so new, that special attempts must be made to reach those people whose disabilities limit their enjoyment and participation in various cultural experiences.

When it was first suggested to the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration that an effort be made to persuade the museums of the country to open their collections for the enjoyment of the blind and their sighted friends, so that together they could experience beauty through the sense of touch, only a few leaders saw the possibilities of such a program. Those who appreciated what a forward-looking development it would be to involve the museums in extending their programs in this way saw, too, the tremendous advances in public understanding of the problems of blindness that could be made in a community sponsoring such an exhibit.

It was in 1956 that the first step in this direction was taken by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration in granting a Research Fellowship to Allen H. Eaton to put together a collection of objects of beauty, develop a plan for their display, and write an interpretive essay on beauty experienced through the sense of touch. With the publication of Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind in 1959, we had our inspiration. The results of this inspiration to date are those described in the second part of this paper.

Idea For Repertory Theater For Deaf

It is interesting to observe that an awareness in one field often stimulates and sharpens awareness in another. For example, at about the same time that

Mr. Eaton was working on his book, Ann Bancroft was re-creating the story of Helen Keller's entry into the world. In the course of studying many aspects of deafness and blindness, and in struggling to understand the "sign language" by which many of the deaf communicate, she saw a performance of Othello given by the deaf players at Gallaudet College. This play was acted out in the sign language.

The quality of the performance so impressed Miss Bancroft and her director, Arthur Penn, that they conceived the idea for a repertory theater of the deaf with important dual objectives. A new theater form would be created and in so doing would provide opportunities for deaf actors to carry their message to a larger public. Secondly, new vocations would emerge from this effort, opening interesting and fresh employment possibilities for a group of disabled people more under-employed than most.

The idea went through many changes before becoming a reality. Support of such an attempt inevitably raised questions of Federal support of the theater before passage of the legislation creating the National Council on the Arts. Finally, however, in 1966, Miss Bancroft's dream became a reality through the formation of the National Theater of the Deaf.

VRA Providing Large Portion of Funds

Operating under the aegis of the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Foundation, an endowment organization created to provide a living testimonial to the excellence and excitement of theater generated by the late American playwright's work, the National Theater of the Deaf is a boldly innovative and stimulating undertaking.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration is providing a large portion of this permanent non-oral repertory theater's funds for the first three years of operation.

Increased communication between the deaf and hearing is one of the Theater's primary goals. For this reason, the dozen actors within the company will perform for both deaf audiences and those with normal hearing. Differing in approach from the many deaf acting groups functioning in this country, the National Theater will do more than "translate" a spoken script into sign language. It will attempt, instead, to create an original, meaningful theatrical expression through the combination of hand movement, mime, music and dance.

To further the end of both evolving a new theater form, esthetically significant in its own right, and of increasing vocational rehabilitation opportunities for the deaf, exploratory work with the utilization and effect of colors and vibrations is being conducted. The O'Neill Foundation is having a drum-like sounding board stage developed to take full advantage of the actors' residual hearing abilities.

In addition to establishing a deaf repertory group, the O'Neill Foundation is forming a school for deaf performers, playwrights and technicians. The school will not only cultivate potential talent for the acting company, but will also train the participants to work with schools and organizations for the deaf in upgrading their theatrical attempts.

Many well-known theater personalities as well as specialists in work with the deaf have joined forces to produce the most professional approach possible. Last summer, the theater group from Gallaudet College (the only liberal arts college specifically geared to the needs of the deaf in the world) presented several performances of its production of Iphigenia in Aulis at the O'Neill Foundation Theater in Waterford, Conn. An audience of invited people from the theater, professionals in the field of deafness and local residents responded most favorably to the vibrancy of the production. This was but the first step in showing that a wider audience exists for this specialized entertainment than had been previously thought. We are gratified that a VRA planning grant made the Gallaudet-O'Neill Foundation exchange feasible.

On April 2, 1967, the National Theater of the Deaf made its first official appearance on a nation-wide television documentary demonstrating both work in progress and the company's hopes for the future. It is evident that this troupe represents yet another way in which the disabled can make significant contributions to the larger society while providing outlets for hitherto untapped talents.

A DIFFERENT PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY

Our overall concern for the aesthetic well-being of our clients, this involvement with the whole man—with his mind, his body and his spirit—has been demonstrated most fully in our work with the blind.

"A blind man studies by his touch that relationship required between the parts of a whole to enable it to be called beautiful." ⁸ Denis Diderot, the 18th century philosophe, has captured in that one sentence the very essence of one of the most exciting and challenging current trends in work with the blind—the planned appreciation of beauty. How truly "enlightened" Diderot was to understand that sight is only one means of perceiving the world, that the blind should not be cut off from many pleasurable encounters with beauty merely because they "see" with an organ other than their eyes.

There probably exist as many definitions of "beauty" as there are people who attempt to define it. The one seemingly incontrovertible fact that follows from this is the highly personal and subjective nature of beauty. Surely this elusiveness places the burden for seeking meaning on the eyes—or in the hands—of the individual beholder. Just as there are sighted people for whom the concept and enjoyment of beauty is unimportant, so, too, there are those who are blind who care little for these aesthetic experiences. The distinction must be made not between those who have eyesight and those who do not, but rather between those who care and are sensitive and those who are not, regardless of their means of perception.

A desire to heighten the awareness of beauty in the blind awakens us to ways and means of conveying aesthetic significance through touch, hearing, smell, emotion and intellect. This is a cause for the bold and the dedicated.

And it is for those who truly believe that the aesthetic is not something "extra" in civilization, but an essential part of the whole man. The late Allen Eaton was such a man.

To Mr. Eaton and his inspiring book, Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind, the greatest credit must be given for stimulating an evergrowing movement to extend the world of beauty for the blind. He fervently believed that the blind have as great a need for beauty in their lives as the sighted; that the blind can comprehend and enjoy this beauty through means of perception other than the eyes; and most important, that the sighted and the blind can both derive a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment through the mutual sharing of their experiences.

Chose 40 Examples of Handicrafts

Mr. Eaton was, in his own words, "concerned with beauty for those who perceive it in different ways, through different senses yet without difference in the quality of the feeling evoked, so that shared beauty becomes a communication of a high order."⁹

For his Collection of Objects of Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind, Mr. Eaton chose some 40 examples of handicrafts, man-made objects serving a utilitarian or decorative purpose. He established several criteria in selecting the objects included in his exhibit. They reflect his overriding concern for what he thought of as the primary objective of such a collection—the exchange of ideas and emotions between the sighted and the blind.

The objects must "combine the elements of pleasant form, texture and color"¹⁰ (the latter to enable the sighted to obtain maximum satisfaction); they must be small enough to be comfortably held; they must be durable enough to withstand repeated handling. Ranging in time from a fist-axe of the late Stone Age to a modern Finnish glass bowl, and representing a wide variety of materials with their accompanying properties of texture and temperature, the handicrafts were gathered from all over the world.

If Mr. Eaton was among the most vocal contemporary spokesmen for the value of beauty to the blind, and if he added the special emphasis of blind and sighted sharing their experience of beauty, he was certainly not the first to articulate the need for organized exhibits. It is, in fact, extremely interesting to note just how early in the development of concern for the blind the use of grouped tactile objects was instituted.

Private Schools Formed Collections

Research shows us that it is possible to trace the beginning of recorded planned museum work for the blind to one Johann Wilhelm Klein, who, in the first years of the 19th century, prepared a collection of teaching models for the blind of Vienna. Until its destruction during World War II, the museum that he founded contained over 5,000 specimens devoted to all phases of the education and history of the blind. By 1900, most of the nations in Western Europe had made considerable progress in similar museum work.

During the 1870's, Michael Anagnos, as Director of the Perkins Institution in Watertown, Mass., began that school's now extensive collection of objects for study with an assortment of anatomical models brought from Germany. Many other private schools for the blind formed their own collections in the

years that followed, until the use of organized tactile objects became an indispensable part of the teaching process for blind children.

It was not until 1909, however, one century after the beginning of the Viennese collection, that a public museum in the United States undertook a program of instruction for the blind. In that year, the American Museum of Natural History instituted a series of lectures given by specialists in various fields for invited groups of blind persons. Today this museum still encourages the visits of groups of the blind to selected "touchable" exhibits, although there is no formal exhibition program.

Of course, anatomical models are generally not thought of as "beautiful," and objects primarily having an instructional function may leave much to be desired aesthetically. There is an enormous difference between the earlier museum work in Vienna with its comparable elements in the schools for the blind, and the present day museum projects concerned with the appreciation of beauty. The first existed almost solely for didactic purposes; the latter seeks to stimulate the higher sensitivities of the blind. The older exhibits were for the exclusive use of the blind; the current work attempts to involve both the blind and the sighted. It is imperative, therefore, for us to take a broader view and look at the work of some of the "art" museums. In this way, we can better see the fruition of the goals of those people and institutions who share Mr. Eaton's beliefs.

Not Enough Work for Definitive Answer

Among the most interesting factors to be considered in this perusal are the varying kinds of exhibits that have thus far been arranged. The items selected for inclusion and the methods chosen for setting up the exhibit provide a good indication of the underlying philosophy of the institution responsible for its establishment.

Should regular museum collections be opened to the blind as just another segment of the museum-going public? Should the blind have exhibits prepared for their use only, with both the articles included and the design of the exhibition specifically geared to their needs? Should the blind and the sighted view the exhibits together so that an interchange of ideas and reactions is facilitated, as Mr. Eaton proposed?

Not enough work has been done in this area to pinpoint a single definitive answer. Moreover, there may not be just one "right" way of doing things. There seems to exist a basic consensus, however, among those museum people who have made special attempts to serve the blind as to what arrangements the blind themselves prefer. The "look but don't touch" attitude, which all too frequently prevails in a museum's exhibitions for the sighted, is obviously untenable when applied to the blind.

VRA Staff's Expertise Also Utilized

It is nonetheless true that priceless objects of art cannot be handled by the layman if they are to be preserved, even if it means excluding the blind from an intimate knowledge of these works. It consequently takes careful planning

and much imagination to arrive at a satisfactory compromise, one that enables both the curator and the blind visitor to feel relaxed.

It has been very exciting for us at the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration to have been able to take an active part in the early stages of recent exhibit planning for the blind. This we have done both through the awarding of grant monies and the utilization of our staff's expertise. As previously indicated, Mr. Eaton was able to finish his memorable book while on a VRA Research Fellowship. In addition, what is perhaps the most meaningful museum effort to date has been undertaken at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh through the encouragement and guidance of a VRA-sponsored pilot study. In March of 1966, this museum opened the Mary Duke Biddle Gallery for the Blind, building on the knowledge and experience gained during the initial study period.

The Gallery's inaugural exhibit consists of 63 pieces of sculpture, from the Stone Age through the 20th century, which give insight into the historical development of art. Many of the great masters, including Degas, Maillol, Moore and Rodin are represented. What more appropriate work than the Rodin Hand, one might ask, could have been picked as the symbol of the exhibit? A favorite piece in the collection is a beautifully formed cat—sitting proud and tall—from an Egyptian tomb of 2,000 B.C.

It is especially noteworthy for us to consider the results of the pilot study since they tell a great deal about the needs and abilities of the blind to respond to beauty. What is more, they supply the basic information required for successfully developing an exhibit for the blind.

Care Chosen For Variety of Media

During the course of the pilot project, groups of selected students from the North Carolina State School for the Blind were exposed, not only to the pieces of sculpture, but to the entire cultural and historical context in which they were created. It was clearly shown that the blind could comprehend this type of extensive survey, that the objects could be enjoyed through the immediate sense of touch and in their larger cultural setting. In fact, there was a noticeable ability of the blind to relate their tactile experience with art to other areas of learning.

The objects for exhibition were finally selected with intellectual, aesthetic and tactile considerations in mind. Care was given to choose a variety of media whose surfaces radiated varying temperatures and tactile sensations.

It was also observed that reproductions were unsatisfactory, both textually and psychologically. As Mr. Charles W. Stanford, Curator of Education and director of the exhibit, pointed out, "the purely psychological attitude of having in one's hand an original object, whether it be 6,000 years old or ten years old, is vastly important and cannot be overestimated."¹¹

The observations made during the pilot study indicated that the blind would derive the greatest benefit from a gallery specifically designed with their needs

in mind. The sighted are allowed to use the Gallery daily for a limited time only. An exhibition area was created, consequently, that allows the blind visitor to be self-sufficient in his exploration of the art works.

VRA and the North Carolina Museum together evolved a set of guidelines delineating just what provisions must be included in planning the exhibit to insure the convenience and comfort of the blind. A relief map showing the Gallery's layout; a mounted braille explanation of how to use the Gallery; specially constructed display counters enabling accessible but not precarious handling of the objects; a railing to facilitate the blind person's movement through the exhibit; braille labels for each article; pleasant flooring materials; a braille catalogue analyzing the exhibit in some depth; a library-study area including the first braille art history books, transcribed and donated through the auspices of the Library of Congress; and trained docents, were all agreed upon and are being utilized to give the blind as full an appreciation of the exhibit as possible.

The docents enable the blind visitors to add deeper dimension to their museum experience through the exchange of the information and impressions so highly prized by Allen Eaton. The inclusion of the library area and the planned series of future seminars to provide the opportunity for further discussion and historical study are elements of the project that would certainly please him.

VRA is extremely proud to have provided much of the impetus for this project. It is hoped that it will reach many of the 11,000 blind children and adults in North Carolina, and will be only the first of many similar projects in other cities and states. Indeed, one of the most significant ramifications of the North Carolina project is the realization of a museum's function—its responsibility to serve the public. This, of course, is especially true of a state supported museum. The public institution is obligated to meet the needs of the blind just as it must provide services to the non-handicapped. Not to provide services to the blind is, in many ways, an abdication of this responsibility.

The other project with which we are directly involved is also expected to have far-reaching consequences in the development of future exhibits for the blind. It is believed that a VRA grant to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. will facilitate the evolution of methods and techniques that museums throughout the country can utilize in establishing exhibits for the blind. This "know how" may very well be of greater importance than the final exhibit itself.

It is easy to acknowledge the fact, although we do not always like it, that museums are a rather specialized part of life. Millions of people in the world never go into a museum and are not interested in doing so. However, it is my very firm conviction that much more enjoyment of what is in museums can be had by many more people, especially by our handicapped people, if methods are found to take advantage of the way in which they can best secure this enjoyment.

To this end, the initial Smithsonian pilot demonstration was undertaken in June of 1966. A NASA-prepared exhibit, showing the history of flight in the United States from the Wright brothers to the astronauts, and a small collection

from the Smithsonian's Textile Hall, illustrating the development of textiles from raw material through finished product, were set up in the Arts and Industries Building.

Prefer Staff Members Answering Questions

The NASA exhibit utilized scale models to give an insight into both the scientific concepts of flight and space, and specific aviation vehicles. These objects were accompanied by recorded description and explanation. The Textile Collection experimented with representative scaled models of the Smithsonian's regular exhibition. Visitors followed tour guides around the area, handling the models corresponding to the larger exhibits on permanent display.

The data collected from these demonstrations shows that blind museum-goers enthusiastically prefer having staff members answer questions rather than listening to taped explanation. What is more, to encourage the shared experience between the sighted and the blind, the Smithsonian is planning to integrate these special exhibits throughout the museum complex instead of maintaining a separate gallery.

Another pioneering museum is the Salt Lake Art Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, an institution dedicated to the exhibition of the work of contemporary artisans and craftsmen. Building on Mr. Eaton's experience and observations, the Center has adopted a somewhat different approach in its planning for the blind. In this Center, according to its Director, "the blind were to be invited to regularly scheduled exhibitions as simply another segment of the community, one hitherto excluded. They would be encouraged to enjoy objects of fine arts and crafts not selected for exhibition on the basis of their potential appeal to the blind, but chosen by an outside juror employing the usual criteria."¹² In other words, whatever works are chosen for display in the Center because of their artistic merit would be shown to the blind for the same reason. Since the Center's Program for the Blind was inaugurated in November of 1964, groups of blind persons have been able to visit two or three sculpture and craft exhibits each year.

Of course, the very nature of the objects included in a crafts exhibit lends itself to examination and enjoyment by the blind. As the Director pointed out, "one advantage of the fingers over the eyes is the ability to encompass a form, to examine two sides simultaneously. . . . The beauty of three-dimensional form, the tactile quality of surface, varying temperatures, resistance of surfaces to the fingers and the aroma of certain woods and fabrics"¹³ all help to stimulate the kind of enjoyment to which the blind are particularly sensitive.

Published in Printed and Braille Edition

Like the North Carolina Museum and the Smithsonian, the Salt Lake Art Center relies heavily on the services of well-trained docents who are able to guide the blind intellectually through the exhibition. A descriptive catalogue of selected items from each exhibit is published in both a printed and a braille edition.

Twentieth century art has produced extensive experimentation with new forms and methodologies. One noticeable trend places increasing emphasis on

the non-visual aspects of artistic creation, with tactile experience becoming an end in itself. The ramifications of this kind of exploration hold a wide range of possibilities for aesthetic enjoyment by the blind.

A teacher in Montana, for example, has created an art form which he calls "tactiles," the adjective used as a noun much in the same way as Alexander Calder's work has introduced "mobiles" and "stables" into the language. The art object must be explored manually to understand its meaning and it is the sensations and thoughts arising from the touching that create the tactile's aesthetics. South Sea Island Image is such a tactile. "One hand presses a mound of bulk cotton. Playing over the back of this hand is a man-made zephyr—accomplished by rheostatically reducing the blow and heat of a hand hair dryer. Induced is a wisp of the escapist's wistful chimera."¹⁴

"Touch Me," the exhibition beckoned. And like another famous youngster who found adventure by following a similar invitation to "Eat Me," the children at the Junior Gallery of the Houston, Texas Museum of Fine Arts are discovering new worlds through the use of their hands. This particularly rewarding, well-planned, beautifully laid out exhibit is the result, in part, of the private and public responsibilities of Mrs. Susan McAshan. As the mother of a blind youngster and a member of the board of the Rehabilitation Center in Houston, Mrs. McAshan realized the void existing in the cultural facilities available to her child and the many other children with similar disabilities. By making an excellent collection of sculpture and pottery available to a hitherto excluded and untapped museum population, and by inviting artisans to demonstrate their crafts with the children feeling the creative process as it occurs, the Houston museum is performing an invaluable service.

We are becoming aware of the increasing variety of sources sparking an interest in museum projects for the blind. The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, private institutions, state-supported museums, individual philanthropists, specialized schools for the blind, and now, the Office of Education has joined the ranks of the concerned.

Using funds given to the several states under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Florida State School for the Blind in St. Augustine has been awarded a grant to hire a full-time curator responsible for establishing a "Touch and Learn Center." This Center is concerned with the "aesthetic" in only the most general sense of the word since the objects selected for the collection need not be beautiful at all. They are picked to show the blind what the sighted see in their everyday lives.

Although this project is much more in keeping with the Vienna School rather than the "shared beauty" approach, it is encouraging to see the Office of Education involved. Perhaps this kind of support can be the jumping off point for a heightened interest in the aesthetic needs of the blind.

Even Cursory Glance is Place to Start

It was not my desire to examine in this article every existing museum program for the blind. There are several that we learn about, as mentioned, through their involvement with VRA. We try to leave our philosophical imprint on them. Others come to our attention through the art journals. The reports of friends and interested people add to our knowledge further. But all of these sources provide only a partial listing.

And what is to be gained by knowing what museums have programs and what museums do not? Surely the quality of the programs cannot be determined just by an awareness that they exist. But even a cursory glance is a place to start, to educate, to instill the importance and vibrancy of this concept into as many people as possible.

The art of communication must be cultivated to be meaningful. The blind and the sighted have a great deal to learn from one another and the exchange can only benefit both groups. As Shakespeare's King Lear says to a blinded Gloucester, "a man may see how the world goes with no eyes."¹⁵

And so he can.

FOOTNOTES

¹William Roerick, Salt Lake Art Center's 4th Annual Utah Designer-Craftsmen Exhibition Catalogue, November 1964.

²John F. Kennedy, "Statement by the President upon establishing the Advisory Council on the Arts, June 12, 1963," Public Papers of the Presidents (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 474.

³John F. Kennedy, "The Arts in America," article originally appearing in the December 18, 1962 issue of Look magazine, Public Papers of the Presidents, 1963, pp. 904-905.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 904.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 905.

⁷Lyndon B. Johnson, Remarks made upon transmitting the Administration's recommendations for a National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities to the Special Subcommittee on Labor in the House and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities in the Senate, March 10, 1965.

⁸Denis Diderot, "Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See," Early Philosophical Works, Margaret Jourdain, ed. and trans. (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1916).

⁹Allen Eaton, Beauty for the Sighted and the Blind (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959), p. 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹¹Charles W. Stanford, "A Museum Gallery for the Blind," Museum News, XLIV (June 1966), 21.

¹²James L. Haseltine, "Please Touch," Museum News, XLV (October 1966), 12.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴Paul Barron, "Tactiles," Design, LXVI (September-October 1965), 25.

¹⁵William Shakespeare, King Lear, Act IV, Scene 6, Line 154.

"... I shall finish with one bit of personal philosophy. I hold myself to be a part of a reasoned and loving creation. Whatever of that love and reason is in me is to be rescued from false and destructive elements, and destructive elements, and dedicated to God for the good of all things. Any handicap, including blindness, will hinder, but cannot obstruct, the genuine effort of the person who is capable of love and reason. To make this statement something better than a platitude or pious utterance is my assignment."

Louise D. Cowan

